

Jonathan Law
Governor of the Colony of Connecticut, 1741-1750

Born: August 6, 1674, Milford, Connecticut

College: Graduated from Harvard, 1695

Political Party: None

Offices: Justice of the Peace and Quorum, 1709

Judge, New Haven County County Court, 1710-1725

Deputy, Connecticut General Assembly, 1706-1717

Assistant, 1717-1725

Deputy Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1724-1741

Chief Justice, Connecticut Superior Court, 1725-1741

Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1741-1750

Died: November 6, 1750, Milford, Connecticut



Born in Milford, Connecticut on August 6, 1674, Jonathan Law was the only son of Jonathan and Sarah (Clark) Law. Both of his parents were from prominent Connecticut families. As a young man he briefly served as a minister before leaving for Harvard to study law. He graduated from Harvard in 1695 and worked as a lawyer. In 1698 he established an office in Milford.

In May 1709, Law became a Justice of the Peace and of the Quorum for New Haven County, later being named Judge of the County Court of New Haven County and Assistant Judge of the Connecticut Superior Court. He was elected Deputy to the Connecticut General Assembly in 1706 and served several terms until 1717. In that year he was chosen an Assistant, serving as such, with the exception of one year, until 1724. In October 1724, he became Deputy Governor and in May 1725 Chief Judge of the Superior Court. He held these latter two offices at the same time, which was possible under the government of that era. By the time Law came to the governorship in October 1741, following the death of Governor Joseph Talcott, he was 67 years old and had been active in the colonial government for 35 years.

The Colony of Connecticut had long struggled with England over the right to make its own laws. On February 15, 1727/8 a decree by his Majesty in Council made a determination against the

Connecticut intestate estates law. A test of that decree came while Joseph Talcott was Governor, when an intestate case was appealed to England by a Connecticut resident. Legal arguments in the case, Clark vs. Tousey, continued during Jonathan Law' s term as Governor. In spite of the fact that the plaintiff, Samuel Clark, was his first cousin, Governor Law instructed Eliakim Palmer, the Colony' s agent in London, to "assist and defend the said Thomas Tousey against the Said Samuel Clark ... in the most vigorous and best manner," emphasizing that laws "made by Vertue of our Charter" rather than English common law should hold sway in Connecticut. With a solid defense based on Law's legal positions and arguments, Connecticut' s position was ultimately upheld by an English court, thereby confirming the authority of the Charter.

The 1740's were also years of a religious revival known as the "Great Awakening". Congregational Churches experienced divisions in their congregations, the " Old Lights" wanting to keep things as they were; the "New Lights" embracing and advocating reforms and worship with more spirit and fervor. So many clergymen opposed each other that the General Assembly of Connecticut passed a law forbidding traveling ministers from preaching in any congregation without the permission of the minister of that congregation. Governor Law, as well as many other members of Connecticut's government, sided with the Old Lights. Since the separation between church and state was not as definite as it is now, this led to political divisions in Connecticut for many years.

Connecticut troops experienced action under Governor Law when he sent them to join the combined forces of the New England colonies that marched against and captured Cape Breton, Nova Scotia from the French in 1745 during King George's War. This was an important victory for England and its colonies. After the war Connecticut retained 200 men stationed on the borders of New York and Massachusetts and along its own coastline for its own defense.

Jonathan Law lived at a time when a person's life span could be short, as medical knowledge about diseases was not very advanced. Although he lived to be 86 years old, his wives were not as fortunate. Law married five times and had a number of children, seven of them sons. Most of his wives were descended from prominent political New England families. Jonathan Law's marriages were:

- On December 20, 1698 to Anne Eliot, daughter of Rev. Joseph and Sarah (Brenton) Eliot. Anne Eliot was the granddaughter of John Eliot, the apostle, and of Governor William Brenton of Rhode Island.
- On February 14, 1704/5 to Abigail Arnold, daughter of Josiah and Sarah (Mills) Arnold. Abigail's grandfather was Governor Benedict Arnold of Rhode Island.
- On August 1, 1706 to Abigail Andrew, the daughter of Rev. Samuel Andrew, the rector of Yale College.
- In 1725 to widow Sarah (?) Burr of Fairfield, Connecticut.
- In 1730 to Eunice (Hall) Andrew, daughter of John and Dorothy (Lyman) Hall; widow of Rev. Samuel Andrew, the son of the rector of Yale College; and aunt of Lyman Hall, signer of the Declaration of Independence from Georgia.

Some of the children and grandchildren went on to serve in Congress and to hold other national political offices.

Jonathan Law was considered to be a talented, amiable, and even-tempered man, one who promoted religion, education, and cooperation. He died on November 6, 1750, shortly after the Fall session of the General Assembly had ended. He is buried in Milford Cemetery, Milford, Connecticut. The high school in Milford, Connecticut is named for Governor Law. When a bridge was erected to honor the early settlers of Milford, the doorstep from Jonathan Law's house was included in the stonework.

Bibliography

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Portrait

The portrait of Jonathan Law, 31" x 36" in its frame, was painted by James Weiland from another copy.

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